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# LETTER

## ANTE-BELLUM BLACK TRAINERS AND JOCKEYS

By Alexander Mackay-Smith

In the southern states before the Civil War class distinctions were firmly established. Major landowners and well-to-do city people were known as "quality," their less fortunate neighbors as "white trash," and their black slaves as "servants." Among blacks such distinctions were even more rigid. The "field hands" were a cut below the "house servants." Above them both were the black trainers and the jockeys who conditioned and rode the race horses bred and campaigned by many big plantation owners. There is an old saying "All men are equal on the Turf (race course) and under it." Certainly the shared enthusiasm for racing and the dependence on black trainers and jockeys particularly when, as was often the case, large sums were bet on the outcome of match races, tended to develop between masters and servants an especially close relationship. This often resulted in the delegation to slaves of major responsibilities, which in turn led to special treatment.

The names, faces and appearances of some of these black horsemen were put on canvas by the Swiss-born, London-trained artist, Edward Troye, who from 1832 to 1872 painted most of the famous race horses in the United States. Included is his portrait, dated July 1832, of Johnson's Charles holding the grey stallion MEDLEY. In 1884, when Charles was about 74 years old, his recollections, entitled "My Life as a Slave," were transcribed and published in Harper's Magazine for October (pp. 730-738). The following excerpts furnish a unique picture of the old South's greatest racing man, William Ransom Johnson, and of his trusted and highly successful jockey, trainer and stallion man, Johnson's Charles Stewart, born about 1808 at Pocahontas, Virginia, across the Appomattox River from Petersburg. Other Troye portraits illustrate this article.

### JOHNSON'S CHARLES STEWART

"My (Johnson's Charles') father - dat is I hear folks say dat was my daddy, an' he 'lowed so hisself. . . his name was Charles Stewart; he was free, an' so was all his folks. He was a mighty light mulatter; he looked like one o' dese yere Mexikin somebodies. He lived en a good large house. His wife an' children staid right dar all de time. He was a sea-farrin' man - I liked to set en de chimbley-corner en my daddy's house an' hear him a-telling an' a'narratin' all about dem whalin' vyages he went on, whar de fishes has got calves an' gives milk, same as cows. . . .

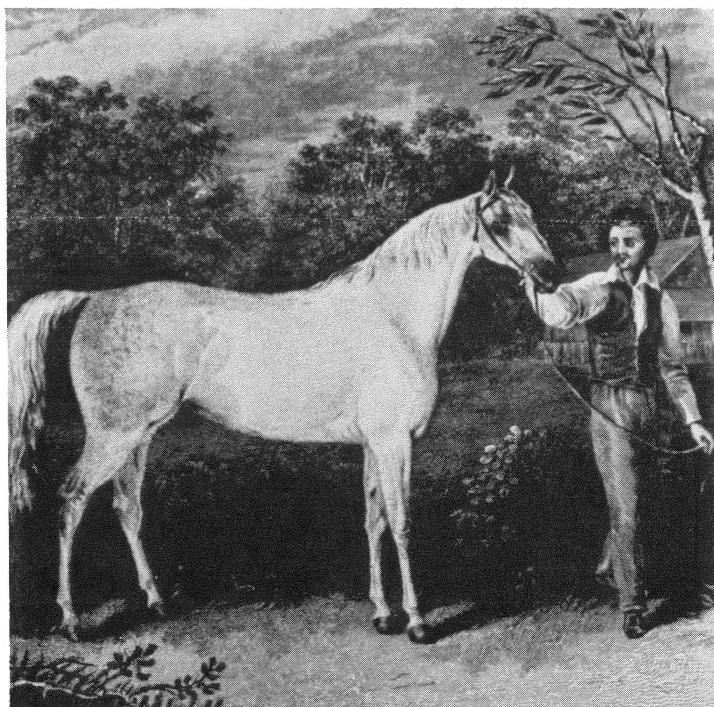
"He was mighty good to me - it was share and share alike with his yother children. He tried time an time agin to buy me, but dey wouldn't sell me, nor hear about it. I 'vided my time 'twixt dar (father's house), and Aunt Mary Stevens, (father's sister), where Mammy staid when she aren't out home at ole Marster Enoch Vaughan's what she belonged to, two miles out from

town. Aunt Mary Stevens was allers givin' me cake an' candy. Mammy's name was Sally.

"You couldn't ha' lit down on no bigger little yaller rascal dan me. I lived amongst 'em all (three) just as limber and mischievous as any little coon dat eber stole corn. Old Colonel Vaughan died when I was a baby-child. Arter I was goin' on 'bout ten o' leven year old, my young mistis, Miss Lizzie Pace, what used to be Miss Lizzie Vaughan, dat I done fell arr to when her pa done died, she got broke - an my daddy he was gone (to sea) and dey jes' up and sole me en my tracks ter Colonel William R. Johnson, De Napoleon of de Turf.

### THE NAPOLEON OF THE TURF

"My marster was de picter of a fine ole gen'leman; he was a fa'r-lookin' man, with thick white hyar, an' eyes dat jes' snapped fire at you; he was what you call a plain gen'leman, an' didn' b'lieve his coat an' pants was de makin' of him; he treated



Johnson MEDLEY with trainer, Johnson's Charles Stewart. Reproduced in the 1833 issue of the American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine.



Robert Aitcheson Alexander's undefeated ASTEROID with trainer Ansell and jockey Brown Dick. Painted by Edward Troye, December 1864.

Courtesy of Paul Mellon Collection.

his servants like dey was de prime cut, an' dey all loved him. He was a yearlthy gen'leman, an' ef dere is any good place anywhere, it 'pears to me like he ought to be in it.

"Lord! he was a great man, sho enuff. "An' as for horses, ef he jes' only walked by a horse to look at it, he could tell you jes' how far dat horse could run. Why, dere was a mar' named CLARY FISHER, an' a nag called BONNETS O' BLUE, dat I raised myself, which was REALITY's daughter. When dey was runnin' (at the Washington Course, Charleston, South Carolina, Feb. 21, 1831), de ole man walked by CLARY FISHER an' looked at her fore-legs, an' he seed a sign in one of her fore-legs dat she would lay down in runnin' a mile an' three-quarters; he tole Mr. Crowell to go back an' bet every dollar he had, an' Mr. Crowell went back an' bet his three plantations, an' won de wuth of 'em, jes' as Colonel Johnson tole him.

#### GROOM

"De place whar he (Colonel Johnson) lived was a mighty fine farm an' house named Oakland, jes' eighteen mile fum Petersburg an' twenty-two fum Richmond; but I neber staid dar - no, sir. De Colonel he jes' dashed his eyes ober me - I was monst'ous lean an' peart fur twelve year ole - an' says to some of de quality dat was a-settin' long-side: Here's a light weight for my New Market stables, an' Arthur Taylor's handling. Do you know a horse when you see one, boy? Yas, sir, I says: I knows a horse fum a mule jes' as far as I kin see 'em bofe walk. Dey all larfs at dat, an' de nex' thing dey gives me some new clo's all fixed up, an' I was set to wuk de fust wuk I eber done sence I was foaled -

to rub down REALITY, own sister to VANITY. De head manager of de stable den was a Englishman named Arthur Taylor, an' dough he only had eight horses en trainin' at dat time, dar was a big force of boys an' men at wuk on 'em, two boys to each horse, an' another white man second in charge, named Peter. . . .

#### EXERCISE BOY

"How I did love dem horses! It 'peared like dey loved me too, an' when dey turned deir rainbow necks, all slick an' shinin', aroun' sarchin' fur me to come an' give 'em deir gallops, whew-e-e! how we did spin along dat ole New Market course (Petersburg, Va.), right arter sunrise in de cool summer mornings! Lord! how proud dis nigger was, when dey called me "Johnson's Charles," an' I used to come a-clippin' down de track en a two-mile heat!

#### APPRENTICE RIDER

"When I was 'bout thirteen year old . . . I was sarnt down to Norf Kyallina to ride for Mr. Peter Davis . . . I went all alone, an' when I got up on de stage at Petersburg in my new suit o' store clo's, wid ten dollars in my pocket an' more to come, I was 'high come up', I tell you. . . . I staid down dar near Warrenton for nigh on to six months, an' den I got a notion to go home, so I done went.

#### JOCKEY

"De fust race eber I rid was in a sweepstake, a mile an' a repeat, on JOHN STANLEY trained by Arthur Taylor, when I was 'bout thirteen year ole, an' weighed

in at seventy pounds. I was one o' dese yer fever- an'-ague little fellers what ain't got no flesh to take off nohow; an' ef I warn't de proudest nigger! Ebery spring and autumn I rode stakes for him (Col. Johnson), an' bout dose years we trained BONNETS O' BLUE, BLACK STAR, JEANNETTE, LAFAYETTE, FLYIN' CHILDERS, BETSEY RICHARDS, JOHN RICHARDS and SIR HENRY (All top race horses).

"Dat same time (race on May 27, 1823, at the Union Course, Long Island, N.Y. between SIR HENRY representing the South and AMERICAN ECLIPSE, representing the North) I rid de stake for John C. Stevens (head of the Northern syndicate) on his YOUNG SIR ARCHY and los' it by jus' eighteen inches; but I made my three hundred dollars an' de fines' suit o' clo's you eber see. I tell you, I walked 'round like a ole gobblor wid a red flannel tail tied on to his hind leg when we got back home agin.

#### TRAINER

"By de time I was twenty year old (c. 1828-29) marster he calls to me one day, an' he says: 'Charley, my boy, I has layed out for you to hab a stable of your own separate 'pinting. You is ole enough, an' done seed de rights of things long enough to be my deprity yourself, so I is goin' to send you ober to my stable one mile from New Market, an' I specs you to take everything into your own keer, an' send home some o' dem lazy scoundrels dat is hidin' out dar ....' So, sho 'nough, I went to de stable outside o' New Market, an' dar I was de boss ober nine little niggers an' four big ones, 'sides two white trash dey called helpers. Wa'al I had a nice stable full of nags. Der was MEDLEY, an' SLENDER, an' TARIFF, an' ARAB, an' more too, but I disricollects de oders now. (1) Dat was de fust o' my turnin' out, an' I tell you I felt so fine dat my own mudder wouldn't ha' knowed me fur her son. I had plenty o' money, an nobody to say nothin' to me. I jes' had to train an' exercise my horses an' send 'em up when dey was wanted.

#### MARRIAGE

(Charles wanted to marry Betsey Dandridge and to buy her from her master, Isham Puckett, who agreed to sell for \$350.00.)

"I tell you I was pleased. Befo' a mule could kick, I jumped round to Mr. Jefferson Ball's office (in Richmond, Va.)

(1) MEDLEY, f. 1824, gr. h. - SIR HAL ex REALITY. Beat the great mare ARIEL. Stood in Va., Pa., Md. & Ky. His half-sister was SLENDER by SIR CHARLES, - full sister to the great mare BONNET'S O' BLUE. ARAB, f. 1820 SIR ARCHY-BET, BOUNCE by SIR HARRY. Won 5 notable races, defeating FLIRTILLA, SIR HARRY, JANETTE. Stood in Va., Tenn., Ky., Ga. TARIFF, f. 1824, full brother to ARAB. Successful race horse. Stood in Va., Tenn., Ohio.

He was Major Puckett's brother-in-law, an', besides dat, he was de money agent for Colonel Johnson, an' dat's how come he was my agent too. I drawed out three hundred an' fifty dollars, for I had a made a heap dat las' year, more'n I could spend in clo's and tobacco, more spesherly, too, by reason dat de Colonel always give 'em bofe to me.

"I had de best kind of a house ajinin' my trainin' stable, an' you neber seed de like of all de grand things as was give to us. I hauled home three cart-loads o' weddin' presents. Sech furniture an' fixins was as fine as dey could be. Lord! When I looks back to dem days an' think 'bout all de money, an' dogs, an' chickens, an' ducks, an' geese, an' pigs I had, an' whole chests full of fine clo's, an' more chaney dan we could eat out of en a year, an' de Colonel ready to hand me out a hundred dollars ebery time I ax for it an' think no more 'bout 'em dan 'bout spittin' out a chaw of tobacco!"

Because his 1832 marriage to Betsey Dandridge ended in 1836, Charles wanted to get away from Virginia. In 1830 MEDLEY stood as a stallion at W. R. Johnson's "Oaklands" near Petersburg; in 1831 with Robert Hurt, Halifax Court House, Va.; in 1832 with John Charles Craig of "Carlton," near Germantown, Pa.; and in 1833 with James M. Selden at the Central Course, Baltimore. In July 1832, at the close of the breeding season, Col. Johnson sent Charles to "Carlton" to bring MEDLEY back to "Oaklands" before transferring him to J.M. Selden for the 1833 breeding season. When Charles

was at "Carlton," Edward Troye painted him with MEDLEY, this being one of the first four portraits of horses that Troye executed in the United States, all of them in July 1832.

In 1835 MEDLEY stood in Bedford County, Va. with John S. Hurt who the next year moved to Paris, Kentucky. At the end of the 1835 breeding season: -

#### KENTUCKY STALLION MAN

"Dat autumn de Colonel sarnt me out to Kentucky whar I had MEDLEY and MONSIEUR TONSON." The latter, foaled in 1822 in Tennessee and by President Andrew Johnson's PACOLET, invaded the east as a four-year-old and was invincible. He was the sire of ARGYLE and other good horses. In 1838 MONSIEUR TONSON stood with Charles P. Lee of Lynchburg, Virginia; the latter moved to Bourbon County, Kentucky, in 1839 where the horse stood that year. There were no trans-Allegheny railroads at this early date. Charles rode or led MEDLEY, and probably MONSIEUR TONSON as well, over the long road down the valley of Virginia and through the Cumberland Gap into Central Kentucky.

"Our head-quarters was in Paris, Kentucky, an' I staid dar a long time, an' was jes' as happy as a king. In de spring an' fall of de year I would take de horses 'bout from place to place en 'cordance wid de marsters orders, an' I was jes' as free an' independent as any gen'lemen en de land. I had my helpers an' jockeys, grooms an' stablemen under me, nobody was ober me,

an' de squire (Ogden) an' de judge was always somewhat 'bout to read marster's letters to me....Yes, I was mighty happy at Paris an' at Bowling Green, whar I staid jes' 'bout de same, 'viding' my time 'cordin' to de horses.

"Dar was a heap o' rich gen'lmen all through dat country. Dar was Squire Ogden, whar MONSIEUR TONSON stood some time an' was showed in the State Fair wid me standin' alongside, an' we tok de prizes of three fifty-dollar tankards. Ole Henry Clay was always aroun', an' mighty peart an' perlite de ole man was, too, an' knowed a horse when he seed him, I tell you. His son, Henry Clay junior, dey called him, he thought dat much of me he offered Colonel Johnson \$3500 for me himself, but de Colonel he tolle him money coudn't buy me; an' he made jus' de bery same arnser to Wade Hampton, what offered him de bery same price."

In 1840 Charles, with the consent of her master, Mr. Robertson, married Mary Jane Mallory, thereafter paying him monthly rent. About 1842, six months after the birth of their son Johnny, she died of consumption, a heartbreak.

"Arter she was in de ground it jus' peared to me like everything was different, I tuk a dislike to Paris, an' I didn't feel like goin' back to Virginny. It got so arter a while dat I got de squire to write home to marster an' tell him I wanted to go to some strange place, an' marster he writ back dat if I could find a owner to suit me, dat would pay his price for me, I could go, dough he had neber expected to part wid me by sale."

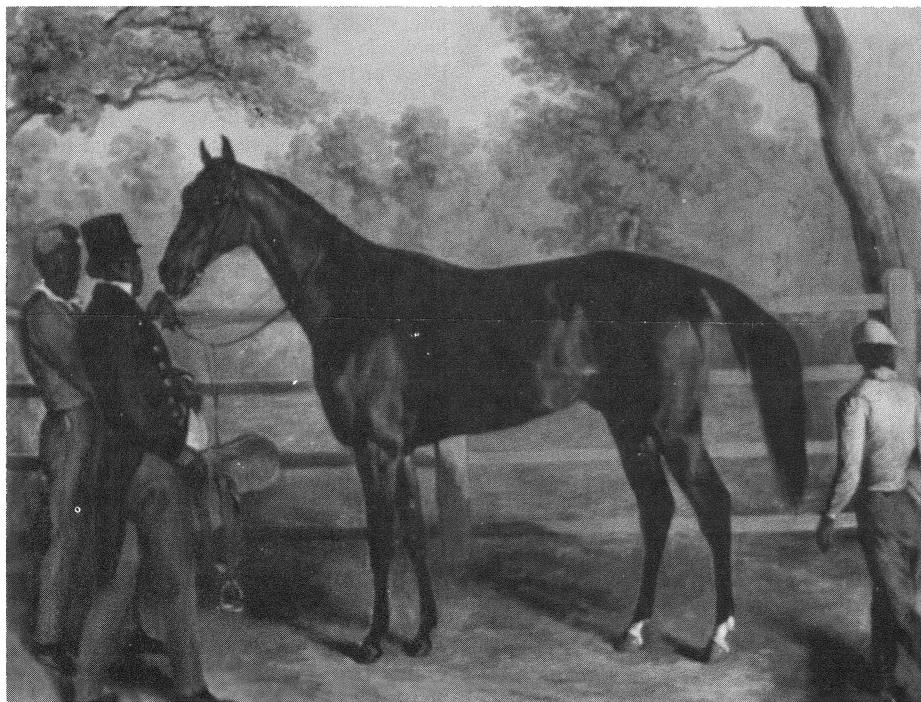
#### PURCHASED BY JUDGE PORTER OF LOUISIANA

It never occurred to Charles to buy his own freedom, which he could easily have arranged to do. Training race horses was what he wanted. As a free negro setting up a public training stable would have been difficult. The solution was a new owner, living in another section, who maintained a big racing stable and who would appreciate Charles' ability and experience.

At Charles' request he was then sold for \$3,500.00 to Judge Porter of "Oaklawn" in Attakapas Parish, Louisiana, on the Bayou Teche, a large plantation with its own training track, which was a favorite centre for turfmen. Charles never had less than 12 horses in training and 45 men and boys under him. After Judge Porter's death (1843), the stable was carried on by his brother James. After the latter's death Charles stayed on as the family coachman; stayed with his mistress throughout the Civil War; and remained as "de pendence" at "Oaklawn" for the rest of his life.

The writer of the 1884 article described as follows Charles' appearance when he came to Oaklawn to recount his recollections.

"In the evening, at what he calls early candle-light, he appeared, and it being a warm night in June, the feeling of self-respect must have been genuine



RICHARD SINGLETON, with Viley's Harry (trainer), Charles, and Lew. Courtesy of the Paul Mellon collection. Capt. Zilla Viley purchased Harry, gave him his freedom, paid him \$500 a year to train the Viley horses, and continued this payment for the rest of Harry's life. The picture is neither signed nor dated. The horse is obviously in racing condition. Troye announced his initial visit to "the western country" in the Lexington (Ky.) Intelligencer of Nov. 7, 1834. Richard Singleton's last race was October 3, 1834, at the Oakland course, Louisville, so it may be assumed that his portrait was painted in November at the Viley Stud Farm near Lexington.

indeed which compelled him to put on a plush waistcoat reaching nearly to his knees, heavy white velveteen trousers ending in a pair of shooting gaiters, the whole surmounted by a long black frock-coat, a spotted silk cravat of vast size, and a small jockey's cap. It was a brilliant, clear evening, and his own cabin not two hundred yards off, yet he carried a blue cotton umbrella of the very largest size. In this costume he has presented himself every evening since. . . ."

This, the dress uniform of the ante-bellum black trainer, is shown in the Troye painting which illustrates this article.

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## BOOK DISCOUNTS

An arrangement has recently been concluded with the world's largest publisher of equestrian books whereby Friends of The National Sporting Library may purchase one or more books on a list of over 100 titles at a 20 percent discount. Please write The National Sporting Library for the list and for additional details.

## MEMBERSHIP IN THE N.S.L.

The National Sporting Library welcomes as new Life Members: Mr. Arthur Godfrey, the Hunt Foundation, and Mr. Orme Wilson, Jr.; as new Sponsors, Mrs. Betty Babcock, Mrs. Helen Groves and Mr. Ben Hardaway III, M.F.H.; as new Sustaining Members, Mrs. Thomas Furness, Dr. John Gardner, Mr. Lawrence Illoway, Mr. George A. Masek, the National Museum of Racing, Inc., and Mr. H. Stewart Treviranus; as new Members, Mrs. Leo Cohen, Mrs. Margaret Furnival, Mr. Edward Johnson, Jr., Mrs. Miriam Rabb, Mr. S. W. Rawls, Jr., and Miss Ellen B. Wells. Sixty-one members contributed a total of \$2,225.00 for 1979.

Several members increased their contributions, raising their membership status to a higher category. The Library extends its appreciation to all contributors.

We wish to remind all of our members who overlooked renewal this year that the Library depends upon their support and urge that they send in their dues.

This will be the last issue of the Newsletter to be sent to members in arrears.

## GIFTS RECENTLY RECEIVED BY THE N.S.L.

The National Sporting Library was fortunate in the past six months to have received a number of valuable contributions to its collections: From Curator and Chairman, Mr. Alexander Mackay-Smith, a large gift of books, prints, other items of art, and sporting records. Many of these are rare, quite old, and of unusually fine quality. There are, for example, *Alken's Sketches* (1854), *George Stubbs' Anatomical Works*, Thomas Berwick, et al, 1800 *Woodcuts, Shires and Provinces* by Sabre-

tache illustrated by Lionel Edwards, and many others including the charming French *Album Crafty, Les Chevaux*. An item of special interest is *Die Schonsten Jagbilder* which contains 85 plates of outstanding hunting scenes from a variety of earlier famous art works.

Mr. Arthur Godfrey has donated an especially fine 20-volume set of the *American Stud Book*, with 1884 supplementary index.

Mr. William Brainard continues to donate copies of the *American Kennel Club Gazette* which keeps our collection complete and up to date.

Mr. J. A. Allen of J. A. Allen & Co., (The Horseman's Bookshop) of Buckingham Palace Road, London, sent a copy of *Bibliography of the History and Organization of Horseracing and Thoroughbred Breeding in Great Britain and Ireland* (books published from 1563 to 1973).

Other gifts include *A Record of Hunt Race Meetings, 1934* from Mrs. Andrew Montgomery and ten Dick Francis novels about steeplechasing and racing from Mrs. Leo Cohen. *Surtees' Hillingdon Hall* and *Young Tom Hall* were among Mrs. Miriam Rabb's offerings; while from George Masek the Library received F. L. Hamilton's interesting chart, *Thoroughbred Sire Lines in the U.S.A.* The Chronicle of the Horse donated several new outstanding books.

As we go to press we have received from Mr. Thomas Marston the gift of five volumes of Mr. A. H. Higginson's American scrapbooks (1899-1920). These will be considered more fully in the next issue of the Newsletter.

## FURTHER LIGHT ON THE 1905 HOUNDS RACE

Dear Mr. Mackay-Smith:

Thank you so very much for the recent letter and your most interesting article on Mr. Higginson.... A great deal has been written about the 1905 (American vs. English hound) match, but as far as I am aware, no one has reported that it was a very dry October & November, the ground was very hard and it turned very cold. This put the English hounds at a great disadvantage. Also, without Mr. Higginson's knowledge, his Huntsman connived with a local farmer to have a bagged fox turned out in front of the English pack. This, of course, created an uproar. The judges of the match, convinced of his ignorance, singularly decided to ignore the incident. So while it did no good, it did no harm.

The dinner at Welbourne, ... was a gala occasion — gentlemen all in "pink" — many Toasts and hunting songs. Dr. McEachron of Canada (one of the judges) had a beautiful voice and delighted everyone present.

I won't bore you with any more old memories. Again thanks, and kind regards,

Sincerely,  
(Mrs. Thomas Atkinson)

## THE GODFREY AMERICAN THOROUGHBRED STUD BOOKS

A recent acquisition of the National Sporting Library is a set of the American (Thoroughbred) Stud Books, in mint condition, donated by Arthur Godfrey, the famous radio personality, who is also an accomplished horseman. Although manuscript records of equine pedigrees go back to classic times, the first printed stud book offered for sale to the public was James Weatherby's "Introduction to a General Stud Book", published in London in 1791, which was revised and augmented in 1793, 1800, 1803, 1808, 1814, 1827, 1858 and 1891. Following the economic depression caused by the aftermath of the War of 1812 there was a revival of racing in the 1820's. On November 25, 1822 the leading horsemen of North and South met at Washington, D.C. for the first of a series of intersectional matches in which AMERICAN ECLIPSE defeated the South's champion SIR CHARLES, who broke down. Because many importations of British Thoroughbred stock, which began in 1730, were never entered in the 1791 Stud Book and its successors, and because many pedigree records were fragmentary, none of these horses, later to achieve outstanding success as sires, were eligible for registration, the amount of their stud fees being consequently reduced. This situation created a renewed demand for an American Stud Book, a demand not actually realized until 1873, a half century later. The intervening efforts to found such a stud book have been admirably set forth by the late Fairfax Harrison in his "Background of the American Stud Book," privately printed in Richmond, Virginia in 1933.

The foundation book was issued in two volumes in New York, in 1873, compiled by the Kentuckian Sanders D. Bruce, the first from A to L, the second from M to Z. On August 5, 1865 Col. Bruce had founded the highly successful weekly *Turf, Field and Farm*, from whose offices the Stud Book was published. In both ventures he was assisted by his younger brother, Benjamin G. Bruce, who thereafter returned to Kentucky, in 1875 founding the weekly *Kentucky Live Stock Record*, which as The Thoroughbred Record has flourished to this day. Col. Bruce was an authority on the pedigrees of Kentucky and Tennessee Thoroughbreds, but was less certain as to the earlier Virginia pedigree. In consequence he took over to a great extent the pedigrees printed by that eccentric and not too reliable Irishman, Patrick Nisbett Edgar, a long time resident of the Roanoke Valley (Virginia and North Carolina), in his 1833 "American Race - Turf Register, Sportsman's Herald and General Stud Book," thus perpetuating many errors. Although the foundation volume of the British Stud Book has been through five revisions (1800 - 1891) there has been no revision of our own Stud Book, despite the mistakes pointed out by Fairfax Harrison and others.